

**Remarks by Commissioner Kevin J. Martin
To the Rural Utilities Service's
Public Meeting on Rural Broadband Access
June 27, 2002**

Thank you, Administrator Legg, for that kind introduction, and thank you for inviting me to present the opening remarks at today's session. Advancing broadband deployment in rural America is an area of great personal interest. In enacting the Farm Bill into law, the Congress and President Bush have created this opportunity to improve rural America's digital infrastructure by granting loan money for broadband rollout in rural areas. I appreciate the invitation and am confident that you will have a productive and informative meeting today.

The issues confronting rural America are extremely important and timely for us to address, and the issues are especially important to me. I grew up on a gravel road in a rural area outside of Charlotte, North Carolina; my address was "Rural Route 3, Waxhaw," and I remember when it was a long distance phone call for my mother to call her sister, who also lived Waxhaw. I understand how important advanced telecommunications services are to folks living in rural and remote areas. We in the government must continue to promote initiatives such as the one to be discussed today that will help rural areas obtain the necessary capital for buildout. At the FCC, our long-standing universal service program also helps rural consumers continue to get comparable service as their urban counterparts.

Deployment of advanced services to all Americans is a critical mission and should be, and is, a fundamental priority for our government. The availability of advanced telecommunications is essential to the economy in the 21st century, dramatically reducing the costs of exchanging information and allowing previously local businesses to serve the world. Telecommunications has been responsible for much of this nation's economic growth in recent years, and I am hopeful that continued broadband deployment will lead to a new period of growth. In order to fully recognize and take advantage of this growth, however, we must make certain that all Americans are given the opportunity to participate, and we must continue to encourage deployment to underserved and rural areas.

With respect to broadband, every consumer deserves the capability to access the Internet and its boundless content, but to do so, we must continue to find ways to reach those more remote customers. In addition, there are numerous exciting public service functions that high speed connections can foster, including innovative applications for telemedicine and distance learning. And these types of public service functions are even more important to those living in rural areas who don't have easy access to the same service as those living in more urban areas.

Down the street a few blocks, we at the Commission are working diligently to find ways that we can help further encourage broadband deployment. While the road will not be an easy one, we must continue to forge ahead and make the necessary regulatory changes that will continue to spur deployment. As the Chair of the Federal-State Conference on Advanced Services, I am fortunate to work with my state colleagues on these issues. We are examining ways in which state and local governments can continue to push technology to remote areas.

While there will certainly be challenges ahead to further deployment, I applaud your efforts here today to encourage deployment in rural areas. This program has great potential, and I am excited about the prospects for its implementation.

Thank you again for inviting me to be with here this morning. I look forward to seeing what the outcome of today's forum will be for the better of rural consumers. Again, I want to extend my best wishes for a productive day.